

Introduction to the Special Issue on Marriage and Family Therapy in China

JOHN K. MILLER

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“May you live in interesting times.”

—Confucius

The purpose of this special section is to introduce five pioneering articles regarding issues relevant to family therapy in China. Systemic family therapy is growing rapidly in China, providing a new opportunity to broaden the field’s tradition of international connectedness. It has been over 30 years since China’s “open door policy” began, signifying China’s transformation from a traditional agricultural society to a modern industrial society (Chen, 1985; Li, Duan, Ding, Yue, & Beitman, 1994; Perkins, 1994). More recent growth in China in the areas of psychology, counseling, and therapy has been fueled by the government’s acknowledgment of the social burden caused by mental health issues in the country (Phillips et al., 2009). Most professional fields in the West, including education, business, and politics, have felt the influence of China’s development over the last few decades. Of all the traditionally Western mental health disciplines available in China, family therapy has emerged as one of the most popular and fastest growing modalities of intervention (Liu, Zhao & Miller, 2012). This may be in part due to the early introduction of family therapy trainings in China in the 1980s and/or the natural fit between systems theory, family therapy, and Chinese society’s emphasis on filial piety and collectivist values (Liu et al., 2012). It is indeed an interesting time for the practice of family therapy in China and for the emerging collaborative efforts between researchers, educators, and therapists from the West and the East. It is likely that the next decade of international collaborations will shape the face of mental health treatment in China for many generations to come. This special section of the *Journal of Family*

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Psychotherapy has been several years in the making and includes contributions by some of the top scholars in the area of family therapy in China.

The first article, "Marriage and Family Therapy in the People's Republic of China: Current Issues and Challenges," by John Miller and Xiaoyi Fang, reviews the current issues and challenges faced by Chinese families and the emerging practice of family therapy in China. The article is the product of a collaboration between Miller and Fang that began in 2005 and culminated in a Fulbright Senior Research Award from by the U.S. Department of State 2009–2010, which provided the opportunity for the authors to work together in China for a year to develop the manuscript. Issues explored in the article include discussion of the myth of the single Chinese culture, the effects of the one-child policy, son preference in China, the little Emperor/Empress family dynamic, academic achievement pressure and Internet addiction, the 4-2-1 family dynamic, and the rapid changes in both marriage and divorce in China.

The second article, "Perceived Process of Change in Family Therapy for Eating Disorders in Shenzhen, China: A Qualitative Study," by Joyce Ma, reports the results of a investigation of the subjective experiences of five Chinese parents and young persons who have recovered from an eating disorder through the process of family therapy. The involvement of the previously disengaged father and the differing roles played by the emaciated young person were two themes that emerged in relation to perceived changes reported by participants. The author of the article is one of the leading scholars on the subject of structural family therapy for Chinese patients suffering from anorexia nervosa and recently published a groundbreaking book relating to her decade-long study of anorexia nervosa and family therapy in the Chinese context (Ma, 2012).

The third article, "*Po Xi Wen Ti*: The 'Mother-in-Law Problem': Navigating Tradition and Modernity in Transforming Familial Relationships in the Chinese Family," by Soh-Leong Lim and Ben K. Lim, explores the Chinese cultural context as it relates to couples who present with intergenerational conflict. The authors explore the subject through the lenses of Bowen theory and intergenerational therapies in concert with important Chinese cultural concepts such as filial piety (*xiao shun*), the mother-in-law (*popo*) and daughter-in-law (*xifu*) relationship, family communication (*jiao liu*) and saving face (*mian zi*), to name a few. The authors thoughtfully explore how these classically Chinese concepts intersect with concepts from intergenerational therapy and Bowen theory.

The fourth article, "Applying Western-Developed Family Therapy Models in China," by Norman Epstein, Amanda Berger, Jennifer Fang, Lauran Messina, Jocelyn Smith, Tiffani Stevenson, Xiaoyi Fang, and Qin Xue Liu, reports on the analysis of a graduate seminar conducted by a combination of students and faculty from a Chinese- and a U.S.-based couple and family therapy training programs. The article discusses the process of how the

group used Western-based family therapy models during the experience, the cultural fit of the models, and the implications of adapting the models for the Chinese context. 75

The fifth article, “Marital Therapy in Mainland China: A Qualitative Study of Young Adults’ Knowledge, Attitudes, and Beliefs,” by Jared Anderson, C. J. Aducci, Rebekah Adams, Matthew Johnson, Wenli Liu, Fuming Zheng, and G. Cole Ratcliffe, explores the views of 24 Chinese undergraduate and graduate students related to family therapy issues. The themes that emerged included the general lack of knowledge about family therapy services in China, beliefs about the role of a therapist as a relationship expert giving advice, stigma associated with seeking services, and the perceived high cost of therapy. 80 85

Confucius tells us, “May you live in interesting times,” a statement that is as relevant today as it was 2,500 years ago when he first wrote it. Of all the ages of human history, it is clear that *this* is an interesting and unique time. The world is getting smaller. More and more the interconnectedness of the planet and its people becomes clear as we begin the second decade of the new millennium. New technologies bring us closer, creating new pathways for collaboration and interconnection; bridging the gaps that divides us. Travel has become easier with bullet trains and jet airplanes. Pathways of communication are opening. Cell phones, text messages, real-time Internet-based consultation, web seminars, distance education, online curriculum, and blogs (to name a few) have all given us new means to learn from one another and influence one another (Miller, 2011). This interconnection has also created some unintended negative consequences in China, such as the phenomenon of Internet addiction (Su, Fang, Miller, & Wang, 2011). Training programs in couples and family therapy, psychology, counseling, school psychology, and so on are rapidly developing in China. Likewise, international exchanges in psychology and couples and family therapy are being created to help bring our work closer and closer together (Miller & Tarragona, 2012). Research collaborations between scholars in different countries allow us to work together in our joint efforts to better the lives of those we serve, all over the world. What frame of reference should we use to guide us as we consider the challenges and complexities of the new environment of interconnectedness that we are entering? What are the “ethics of exportation/importation” and the intended and unintended consequences of our path of ever increasing collaborations internationally? How will Western scholars create genuine and balanced two-way exchanges and collaborations as we proceed? These questions, and others, will continue to occupy us as we explore the interesting times ahead. 90 95 100 105 110

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